

March 7, 2012

Joint Committee on Judiciary  
Room 2500, Legislative Office Building  
Hartford, CT 06106

**Re: HB 5388: Proposed filing fee increase bill to fund Connecticut's legal services programs**

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

This letter is being submitted on behalf of Connecticut's four affinity bar associations, the Connecticut Asian Pacific American Bar Association (CAPABA), the Connecticut Hispanic Bar Association (CHBA), the George W. Crawford Black Bar Association (Crawford) and the South Asian Bar Association of Connecticut (SABAC). CAPABA, CHBA, Crawford and SABAC write this letter to express our strong support for the bill HB 5388 (the "Bill") proposed by the Judicial Branch that would increase court filing fees to fund legal services for Connecticut's low-income populations.

Our organizations represent the interests of many of Connecticut's minority lawyers, judges, legal professionals and law students. We share a common interest in the goals of ensuring access to justice by the minority communities that we represent, and every lawyer's ethical responsibility to support and participate in the provision of legal services to the poor.

Connecticut Legal Services, Greater Hartford Legal Aid and New Haven Legal Assistance represent low-income clients through Connecticut in thousands of cases each year. These organizations provide much-needed free legal assistance to low-income families facing imminent homelessness, victims of domestic violence, disabled adults and children seeking state and federal benefits, elderly individuals facing nursing home problems and collection actions, among countless other civil legal difficulties. At the same time, the longstanding method for the funding of these programs, Interest on Lawyers Trust Accounts (IOLTA), has dropped from \$20 million a year to nearly \$1 million over the last few years. Interest rates on these accounts are below 1%, and will likely remain at those levels for the foreseeable future. These funding difficulties come at a time when the number of low-income individuals in need of these vital legal services continues to grow.


Donations from the legal community have increased significantly, and prior legislative assistance in 2009 has helped address some of the shortfall. Connecticut's legal services programs have additionally struggled to obtain other grants, maximize federal funding, and maintain other sources of funding such as the United Way. While these efforts have helped stabilize the worst of the effects of the IOLTA funding crash, Connecticut's

legal services programs have continued to shrink due to layoffs, attrition without the possibility of replacement, and unpaid furlough days.

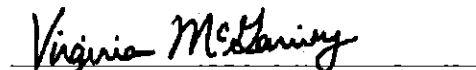
The Bill will ensure the continued provision of quality legal services to Connecticut's most vulnerable populations. Legal aid programs reduce the number of unrepresented people flooding the courts, and help marshal pro bono legal help for the poor from the private bar. Reductions in legal services will increase costs in other safety net programs and delay access to justice to everyone who needs access to the courts.

Thank you for your consideration of this letter of support. We sincerely hope that you will support this initiative to help create a stable and reliable source of funding for legal services to the disadvantaged.

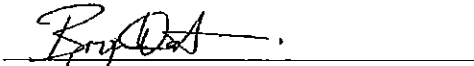
Sincerely yours,



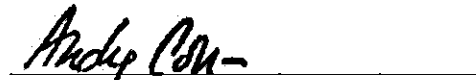
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